

I. PROBLEMOS IR SPRENDIMAI / PROBLEMY I ICH ROZWIĄZANIA

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TRUTH AND THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE OF PERCEPTION

The main objective of the article is to present the phenomenological understanding of the idea of truth (alētheia). In the Heideggerian sense, alētheia is not limited to the traditional rendering of truth as coherence or correspondence. In other words, truth is not restricted to the appropriate or inappropriate ways of the representation of given aspects of cognitive experience. Instead, truth comes close to the notion of perception in the sense that it refers to the general way in which the world is unconcealed to human understanding. Of course, the adopted approach asks us to bracket the subject/object division that stands behind traditional metaphysical thinking ever since the time of Plato. In other words, the subject is not the starting point of experience; rather, the subject is a passive recipient of the kind of being-in-the-world—to use Merleau-Pontyian terminology—that is extending around it. Accounting for the phenomenological understanding of truth obliges us also to look at language not in the representative sense, but rather to regard it as the essencing of the vocabulary of being through which the world is revealed. This means that language is not just an abstract sign system based on the relation of signified—signifier in the Saussurian sense, but the ontological position from which we perceive the world and our existence in it.

KEY WORDS: Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, language, disclosure, truth, accordance, freedom, essence, perception, idea.

Introduction

From a typically hermeneutical perspective, the understanding of the notion of truth is silhouetted against the Greek term *alētheia*. However, the term possesses a much deeper epistemological dimension. In point of fact we need to understand *alētheia* similarly to Heidegger, and therefore, take it to designate a phenomenon called *disclosure* or *unconcealment*.

Concealment deprives *alētheia* of disclosure yet does not render it *sterēsis* (privation); rather, concealment preserves what is most proper to *alētheia* as its own. Considered with respect to truth as disclosedness, concealment is then undisclosedness and accordingly the untruth that is most proper to the essence of truth. The concealment of beings as a whole does not first show up subsequently as a consequence of the fact that knowledge of beings is always

fragmentary. The concealment of beings as a whole, untruth proper, is older than every openedness of this or that being (Heidegger 1993, p. 130).

Thus, truth as *alētheia* refers generally to the conditions in which the world unfolds in our comportment and understanding, and therefore, it comes closer to the idea of perception than to the conventional rendering of the phenomenon of truth (understood as correspondence or coherence). For our purposes, we will divide the notion of truth into two different classes. First, we will look at the idea of propositional truth which came to dominate in the onto-theological tradition. The propositional dimension of truth can be said to open up the theoretical landscape of meaning, where things are reducible to the idea of correctness of representation. Secondly, our understanding of truth will take into account its ontic landscape, i.e., ontic truth as the uncoveredness of entities within the phenomenological field of experience. The ontic aspect of truth discloses the practical dimension of truth that has been disregarded by the onto-theological tradition which sought to reduce human experience to the notions of rationality and consciousness. Taken together what these notions make possible is representative forms of cognition.

The Propositional Landscape of Truth

The propositional understanding of truth is reducible, as we have mentioned above, to the idea of correctness of representation. Truth, therefore, is the effect of what the Greeks called *homoiosis*, i.e., correspondence. Another understanding of truth as correctness of representation is encapsu-

lated in the dictum, *veritas est adaequatio intellectus ad rem*. Thus, truth as adequation is based on the belief that there is a correspondence between a physical entity or condition and its direct representation in the mind. Therefore, truth as well as knowledge is what we achieve when we learn to find the necessary links between the transcendental ego (the subject) and the physical thing or experience (the object).

Needless to say, this is a typically Cartesian understanding of knowledge, since its foundation is rooted in dualism—recall Descartes's famous example of two separate notions of reality that exist side by side and need to be attuned for any meaningful experiences to take place. These two monadic landscapes of experience are the mind and the body, which, as we have mentioned before, must be attuned—for, as Descartes declares, “the nature of the intelligence is distinct from that of the body” (1969, p. 129). Nevertheless, the epistemological consequences of this thinking ask us to go further than that, i.e., not only seek the connections between the mind and the body. Instead, we should see the whole of human experience to be rooted in the subject's correspondence to objective reality or vice versa, as the essence of Cartesianism dwells in deductionism according to which the world is a phenomenon that appears in human deductions and, therefore, it must correspond to them. However, we may never know if the propositions that we have formed about the world are correct, or if they were fallaciously inspired by the Cartesian demon at whose behest we misperceive reality and all our knowledge. The propositional understanding of truth, therefore, discloses the theoretical landscape of the *cogito*, the royal chamber of subjectivity that sees the

world and the experiences that it makes possible through the veil of representation. In other words, the propositions themselves are believed to be the ultimate source of the subject's assumptions connected with the world and all possible experiences.

The Ontic Landscape of Truth

What the propositional understanding of truth takes for granted—or what it simply fails to comprehend—is that consciousness, and therefore, rationality do not constitute the fundamental way in which we are. In other words, without denying the value of conscious experiences, we must signal at this point that the conscious experiences in question are not the basic way in which we find ourselves involved in the world. Therefore, we need to abandon the “ghost in the machine” point of view criticized, for example, by Gilbert Ryle (2001, p. 353) which opens up the theoretical (in the sense of representative) landscape of meaning in favour of our practical involvement in reality; this is what Merleau-Ponty understands through the expression “the flesh of the world” (1964, p. 16). Thus, before we get to be conscious, and therefore, before we are in a position to formulate any propositions about the world that would exemplify the all-pervasive influence of representative consciousness, we are always and already in the world, managing our way in it and coping with things on a transparent basis. This is how Dreyfus addresses the issue:

...the natural situation of everyday activities is meant to show that the traditional epistemic situation of a mind distinct from objects, whether observing or acting upon them, is a deficient mode of being-in-the-world and cannot, therefore, have the braced philosophical implications modern

philosophers of mind have supposed (Dreyfus 1991, p. 54).

Our automatic attunement to reality, which is that of being-in-the-world, is characterized by all the actions that we commit ourselves to that are not beshadowed by intentionality, and therefore, consciousness. The pre-intentional functions constitute the dimensions of our reflexive or instinctive behaviours. All of this really amounts to the idea that our basic way of being is that of automatic know-how and not conscious deliberation. Therefore, when we speak of human experience and the field of knowledge which opens to it, we should first of all give priority to our practical involvement in the world, to the automatic know-how which constitutes the essence of our attunement to the world which thereby creates the landscape for the experience called being-in-the-world, for it is being-in-the-world that obliges us to reformulate our basic beliefs about the importance of rationality and consciousness in human experience.

We can try to come to terms with our practical involvement in the world, in which we transparently cope with things, if we look closely at the notion of *comportment*:

Comportment (*Verhalten*) is a very broad term that is meant to include every instance in which we experience something, and everything that we do... [c]omportment is broader than the class of deliberate actions (although naturally it includes them), because comportment involves things I do or experience without an occurrent mental state in which I intend to do it or register the experience. Thus, comportment includes automatic actions, for example, which reflect a responsiveness to the meaning of a situation (Wrathall 2008, pp. 345–46).

Comportments can be subdivided into two types: authentic and inauthentic. An

inauthentic comportment is most conspicuously illustrated by the fact that our actions are based on an impersonal mode of being, which only means that comportments are not really ours in the sense of subjects; instead, they function as public ways of proceeding. What this means is that there really is no inner, or subjective, dimension of experience. Our identities or selfhoods exist in the actions that we perform and the things that we find ourselves using, but we are in no way entitled to look for a subject outside the context of being-in-the-world. Our being is *in toto* determined by and depends upon being-in-the-world.

Therefore, to comport oneself authentically does not mean to be a non-conformist, who happily announces to the world that “to be great is to be misunderstood” (Emerson 1981, p. 146), or who warns us that “[s]ociety everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members” (ibid., p. 141). To be authentic means to bracket the world and to question the existential modes of being. It also means that we have to take responsibility for our being and yet still remember that who we are and what we do is nothing more than a borrowing from the public existential paradigms which we find already operating and in which we, as the particular individuals that we are, are absorbed. Thus, there is no subject outside the object; there is only our social way of being—that we have called being-in-the-world—which obliges us, at the same time, to be with one another.

The ontic dimension of truth which is uncovered in our practical involvement (as manifested in transparent coping) does not completely reject consciousness as a dimension of the human experience.

It simply prevents reductionism, which sees consciousness as the epistemological landscape that enframes the fullness of our experience of the world. Yet consciousness as a mode of experience does not exist under a thingly aspect; rather, consciousness is attentive as Merleau-Ponty has it, and it determines and plays a very important role in our involvement in the world (2002, p. 31). Nevertheless, the view of consciousness from the perspective that we are proposing here is epiphenomenal. Thus, consciousness is secondary to being-in-the-world. Of course, the epiphenomenal character of consciousness was already presupposed by psychology. For example, Jung sees consciousness as a being that emerges from complexes and unconscious archetypal content (1990, p. 42). Yet in the phenomenological sense consciousness is to be derived from our practical coping with things. Dreyfus observes that, “[w]hen there is a serious disturbance and even deliberate activity is blocked, Dasein is forced into still another stance, deliberation. This involves reflective planning. In deliberation one stops and considers what is going on and plans what to do, all in a context of involved activity” (1991, p. 72).

It follows from the above that consciousness emerges as a side-effect of the breakdown of equipment and the comportments that were said to accompany it. In other words, our basic way of being is transparent coping. Yet when a thing breaks, transparent coping is no longer possible, and we then become conscious, deliberate entities. To illustrate this, let us take as an example (following Dreyfus) the basic way in which we deal with an everyday object like the door. In usual circumstances we

do not stand before the door as conscious subjects deliberating about how to open it, how to turn the doorknob, whether to pull or to push it, etc. This kind of action is performed automatically. It is only when we can't get the door to open that it becomes an object of concern, since its functionality has broken down and together with it our comportment. In this way, consciousness comes to be seen as a mechanism or process that we employ to restore the functionality of things, and therefore, to reinstate the automatic transparent coping which has been disrupted. To avoid being as pessimistic as Schopenhauer (R. Taylor 1985, p. 371), who believed that life is a mistake, we can, on this understanding, come to see subjectivity—the landscape of consciousness—as a mistake, since in itself it is the effect of the totality of breakdowns that we have experienced: not as subjects, of course, but as entities that find themselves living in the public world according to certain cultural and existential paradigms.

On a more speculative note, we could come to see consciousness as nothing more than the memorization of breakdowns which we call concepts. The memorization of breakdowns accords well with Freud's understanding of consciousness as developing from traumatic experiences which, because of their traumatism, were simply remembered (1995, pp. 607–608). The view that we are here advocating is that consciousness is nothing more than a conceptual amplification (memorization) of the failures of our transparent coping. Thus, there is no need to set the theoretical against the pragmatic; rather, we should see theory as the continuation of practice, if by practice we mean transparent coping. If we

follow this thinking, we will free ourselves from all sorts of dualisms which speak of two alternative realities, one real, the other merely illusory. Alternatively, we will come to understand the forgetfulness of being that Heidegger spoke of (1996, p. 1). What he meant is that we as a culture have stopped questioning being in the ontological sense, instead accepting our place amongst the ontic beings already present in the world.

From this point on onto-theology has tried to put human beings in the seat of subjectivity by assuming that human nature is dissociated from the world. Onto-theology has committed itself to the cult of power, whose purpose is to keep human beings in the centre of all experience. In this way onto-theology has tried to make human being the measure of all things. Thus, ontotheology can be read as a way of thinking that grounds the division of subjectivity and objectivity. Yet this can be considered as a simple mistake, since onto-theology erroneously assumes that the concepts which make it possible exist independently of reality, though as we have come to see, the concepts themselves are nothing more than the memorizations of breakdowns of our transparent coping. We can, therefore, abandon all dualistic forms of thinking and understand our experience as extending between transparent coping and conscious deliberation. Both of these modes of being are contextualised by the same existential landscape, and there is no need to see them as paths to two contraposed realities that can be experienced in two different ways. Rather, our being as being-in-the-world can be loosely compared to the phenomenon of culture, which is the ultimate context of all our comportments. Geertz, for example,

maintains that, “[c]ulture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action” (1973, p. 145).

The Landscapes of Language

If we reject the onto-theological estimation of the notion of truth, then what status do we assign to language? In the conventional sense, language was the instrument at the disposal of a fixed consciousness that connected the subjective *cogito* with the presupposed objective existence of the world. Accepting truth as *alētheia* obliges us to bracket the subjective—objective division in favour of truth as the landscape of being-in-the-world, where the world is the reality of language, since it is language that reveals it by opening up a certain locus where the world can be said to take place. In this light, we are obliged to agree with Derrida when he says that, “[t]here is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]” (1997, p. 158).

What needs to be clear from the very start is that our understanding of language will be the poet’s understanding, not the linguist’s. We, therefore, reject the instrumental view of language that sees it as nothing more than a tool in the hands of subjectivity, a tool most necessary for the phenomenon we might refer to as subjective imperialism. We have a rough representation of this very phenomenon in the Bible where both God and Adam describe things in linguistic terms opening up in this way a new dimension for experience.

The instrumental understanding of language, as observed by C. Taylor, can be found in thinkers like Locke, Descartes, Hobbes and Condillac, and it roughly amounts to the subject’s ability to use language

as a tool for the classification of things and experiences (2008, p. 435). All that the subject has to do is link the word or idea to the thing or experience in question. What emerges in this light is a vision of the world as an atomistic organization of the classifications we have learnt to make. Needless to say, the instrumental view presupposes that the world is always and already there, waiting for the subject to divide it according to its scale of interests and concerns. Steiner presents us with an instrumental understanding of language when he makes the observation that:

[t]he classic and the Christian sense of the world strive to order reality within the governance of language. Literature, philosophy, theology, law, the arts of history, are endeavours to enclose within the bounds of rational discourse the sum of human experience, its recorded past, its present condition and future expectations. The code of Justinian, the Summa of Aquinas, the world chronicles and compendia of medieval literature, the Divina Commedia, are attempts at total containment. They bear solemn witness to the belief that all truth and realness—with the exception of a small, queer margin at the very top—can be inside the walls of language (1998, pp. 13–14).

Steiner’s assumption, therefore, is that reality stands in opposition to or outside linguistic experience. Against this line of reason we have the expressive-constitutive theory of language introduced by Herder—a member of the *Sturm und Drang* (C. Taylor 2008, p. 438). What this theory does is claim that language is much more than a referencing device, as is clearly the case in the instrumental view. Of course, no one is denying the fact that language expresses meanings in the sense that it offers descriptions of things and experiences; however, language also creates the landscapes within which the existence of things makes sense:

For the speaker no less than for the listener, language is definitely something other than a technique for ciphering or deciphering ready-made significations. Before there can be such ready-made significations, language must first make significations exist as guideposts by establishing them at the intersection of linguistic gestures as that which, by common consent, the gestures reveal. Our analysis of thought gives us the impression that before it finds the words which express it, it is already a sort of ideal text that our sentences attempt to translate. But the author himself has no text to which he can compare his writing, and no language prior to language.... Language is much more like a sort of being than a means, and that is why it can present something to us so well (Merleau-Ponty 1964, pp. 42–43).

At this point what we really need to do is perform a phenomenological *epoché* and bracket our view of language; what we should ask of ourselves is to come to grips with the type of spatiality that language makes possible. The instrumental view works with the typical Newtonian model which treats space as a container in which things, including us, happen. From this perspective, we find ourselves existing within an objective reality that is antecedent to our being. The expressive-constitutive theory, on the other hand, states that space is not an objective phenomenon into which we are thrown and from which, with our demise, we are extracted. Language opens up the space of the in-between in the sense that it emerges from speech. In conversation, a certain kind of space is opened up which is neither subjective nor objective; it is the space of our mutual interests and concerns. Thus, what language opens up is this common space of the lived experience that we have earlier referred to as the world, which we have argued to be the effect of a cultural paradigm rather than the onto-theological supposition that holds reality to be something independent of us.

If language does open up a space of the in-between, and if the things that appear in this space are predetermined by the disclosure of language, then we can clearly state that things do not exist as we have thought conventionally, i.e., in the sense of a collection of properties. The properties that characterise a thing are not really the thing's, but the language's, since it is language which makes the thing possible. In other words, we always see reality from the perspective of the kind of language that shows it to us. In fact, we come to realize that there really is nothing like a thing in the sense of an object with a fixed configuration of properties.

Language discloses things in the space of the in-between, which we will now call *Geviert*, i.e., the Fourfold as understood by Heidegger (C. Taylor 2008, p. 451). For the present purposes it is enough to see the Fourfold as the landscape of language. In itself it consists of mortals, divinities, the earth and the sky. These four elements are the fundamental contours of the horizon of meanings opened up by language, or to put it differently, the Fourfold is what language must produce for anything like disclosure to happen. Thus, what we have earlier referred to as a thing is really a product of the Fourfold, i.e., of the relations that obtain between mortals, divinities, the earth and the sky. To illustrate this, let us try to understand the notion of thingness and its relation to the Fourfold on the basis of a poem by Wallace Stevens:

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.

The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion every where.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

(Stevens 1998, p. 1151)

We can try to understand the jar's thingness by seeing it as nothing more than an effect of the configuration of and the relations that hold between the four constituents. First of all, the jar in its instrumental sense fits into the arena of human interests and concerns, in this way referring to the sphere of the mortals. At the same time, however, the jar can be much more than a mere instrument. It can have the idea of transcendence about itself, and therefore, it can be said to possess a moral or religious dimension—this being the jar's relation to the divinities. Additionally, the jar must be made of something; the material which constitutes its nature is the earth which does not only refer to ground or soil, but rather it needs to be understood as unformed matter. Lastly, the notion of the sky roughly refers to our understanding of nature in both its creative as well as destructive senses.

A creative view of nature can be found, for example, in the views of American transcendentalists who urge us to become transparent eyeballs and seek communion between man and *natura naturata* / *natura naturans* (Emerson 1981, p. 11). On the other hand, the destructive Darwinian view of nature is reflected in Stephen Crane's short story *The Open Boat*, where we are told that "[s]hipwrecks are apropos of nothing" (1994, p. 790)—a metaphor that considers the meaning of existence which from this point of view is quite vain.

Generally speaking, what we, following Heidegger, have called a *thing* is the effect of the relations that hold between the four constituents of the Fourfold. In other words, the thing appears in its instrumentality to mortals. Its transcendent nature is understood on the basis of the deities that exist within a cultural paradigm, the same applies to the earth as the material from which a thing is made; and lastly, the sky or nature is the idea which both preserves as well as threatens the jar's being—it is the *élan* that allows it to be, but at the same time, it is the force that will one day annihilate it. Thus, the understanding of a thing depends on the understanding of nature within a given cultural paradigm and during a particular historical period.

Conclusion

We should abandon the view that holds that there exists some kind of theoretical "masterplan" to everyday reality. The Platonic belief that theory is the refined status of practice is untrue; rather, it is quite the reverse. *Prima facie*, we are practical beings that cope with things on a transparent basis only to later discover that the breakdowns of practical involvement are the seeds sown on the soil of a new landscape that we call consciousness, which is connected with the instrumental application of language.

Perhaps, if we take into consideration what was mentioned above about language and *alētheia*, we will finally be in a position to understand such mysterious sayings as language is "the house of being" (Heidegger 1971, p. 22), since it is from the perspective of language that we come to see the world. Taylor observes that "language, through its *telos*, dictates a certain mode of expression, a way of formulating matters which can help

to restore thingness. It tells us what to say, dictates the poetic, or thinkerly word..." (2008, p. 451). Additionally, what emerges from this stance is the view that it is not we that speak, but language—and therefore,

language is not a tool at the disposal of the subject, but rather, it creates the subject's self-experience by bringing the Fourfold into being and allowing for things to appear as mattering in a certain historical way.

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PRAWDA JAKO FENOMENOLOGICZNY PEJZAŻ PERCEPCJI

Streszczenie

W głównej mierze artykuł skupia się na przedstawieniu istoty prawdy (*alatheia*) rozumianej z perspektywy typowo fenomenologicznej. Heidegger bowiem uważał, że istota prawdy nie powinna być ograniczana do rozumienia jej jako przynależności i zgodności, jak to tradycyjnie robiono. Innymi słowy, prawda nie powinna być ograniczona do odpowiednich lub też nieodpowiednich sposobów przedstawienia doświadczenia kognitywnego. W gruncie rzeczy pojęcie prawdy powinno być porównywane z istotą percepcji, w której mamy do czynienia z tym, jak świat odsłania się w ludzkim doświadczeniu. Przyjęta perspektywa zawiesza przeciwstawność podmiotowości i przedmiotowości, które stanowią podstawę myślenia metafizycznego już od czasów Platona. Inaczej mówiąc, podmiot nie jest załącznikiem doświadczenia, lecz biernym odbiorcą bycia-w-świecie – odnosząc się do terminologii Merleau-Ponty'ego – rozprzestrzeniającego się wokół niego. Fenomenologiczne ujęcie prawdy zobowiązuje nas jednocześnie do traktowania samej istoty języka w sposób nie symboliczny, to znaczy język nie tyle biernie odzwierciedla rzeczywistość, co poprzez wystaczanie słowa odsłania cały świat. Inaczej rzecz ujmując, język nie stanowi jedynie abstrakcyjnego systemu znaków, opartego na relacji znaczonego i znaczącego (jak u Saussure'a), ale jest ontologicznym punktem wyjścia, z którego postrzegamy świat i nasze istnienie w świecie.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, język, odsłonięcie, prawda, zgodność, *parousia*, wolność, istota, percepcja, idea.

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TIESA IR FENOMENOLOGINIS SUVOKIMAS

Santrauka

Straipsnio tikslas yra pateikti fenomenologinį tiesos idėjos (*alētheia*) supratimą. Pasak M. Heideggerio, tiesa nėra apribota tradiciniu tiesos perteikimu, tokiu kaip koherentiškumas ar analogija. Kitaip tariant, tiesa nėra ribojama tinkamomis arba netinkamomis tam tikro kognityviosios patirties aspekto reprezentacijos formomis. Tiesa artimesnė suvokimo sąvokai, kalbančiai apie bendrąjį kelią, kur pasaulis yra atviras žmogaus supratimui.

Žinoma, toks požiūris reikalauja suskliausti subjekto-objekto padalijimą, kuris nuo Platono laikų yra už tradicinio metafizinio mąstymo ribų. Kitaip tariant, objektas nėra patirties atspirties taškas, bet gana pasyvus Pasaulio–Būties tipo recipientas. Fenomenologinis tiesos supratimo aiškinimas mus įpareigoja taip pat pažvelgti į kalbą ne reprezentatyviaja prasme, bet greičiau kaip į esminį būties žodyną, per kurį atsiskleidžiamas pasaulis. Kitaip tariant, kalba yra ne tik abstrakti ženklų sistema, pagrįsta F. de Saussure'o signifikatu–signifikantu. Tai yra ontologinė pozicija, iš kurios taško mes suvokiame pasaulį ir mūsų egzistavimą jame.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Merleau-Ponty, Heideggeris, kalba, atskleidimas, tiesa, atitikimas, laisvė, esmė, suvokimas, idėja.

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